

Chamber & Views

Bimonthly Publication of the Aruba Chamber of Commerce and Industry

The President's Vision

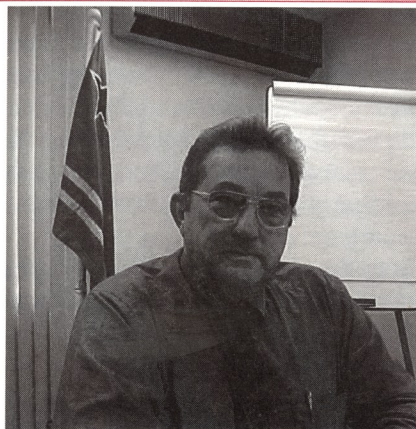
by R.W. Peterson

Introduction

At the beginning of each calendar year the Board of the Chamber elects a President and Vice-President amidst its nine members. For 2001 Mr. J.A. (Tony) Rangel was elected as Vice President and myself as President. As new President I am pleased to have the opportunity to share with you some of my personal views on the Chamber and most of all, what I consider the challenges and issues to be addressed in behalf of the Aruban business community.

The Chamber as Institution

The Aruba Chamber of Commerce & Industry is an integral part of the fabric of our society, in fact it has been part of our island life for over 70 years. Taking into consideration our state of development one cannot imagine the country of Aruba or our business community without an institution of this sort. On January 24 last a groundbreaking ceremony took place in connection with the start of two major projects initiated by the Chamber, being its new office building and the implementation of



a business park called "Aruba Commerce & Finance Park" at Punta Brabo. The Chamber looks forward to the speedy progress of the construction work and to be able to relocate within a year to its modern and spacious accommodation. The months ahead will be dedicated to prepare for this move, which includes the introduction of a new "look" for our organization and new services, such as an audiovisual documentation center. We are also very excited about the potential economic impetus of the business park concept we are seeking to implement and are pleased with the developers which are supporting its realization.

The reorganization of the Chamber as commissioned to outside management consultants in 1998 is now an ongoing process of renewal. The sub-project comprising proposals for improvement of the organization serves as the blueprint for implementation.

The final sub-project, comprising the establishing of the job descriptions and the development of classification scales as well as the introduction of a performance evaluation system, is now also in place.

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The President's Vision

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Like other organizations, the Chamber has a staff of 14 employees dedicated to achieving the organizational goals and supporting the Chamber's Board in every way possible. The Chamber will continue to seek to enhance its work environment, such by means of on-the-job and other forms of training of its employees and by improving their legal position with the introduction of a pension scheme in the course of this year.

Together with our Board-members and staff I will endeavor to accomplish the mission of the Chamber comprising the following activities:

- to represent the trade and industry in Aruba;
- to provide – both solicited and unsolicited – advise and information to the Minister of Economic Affairs concerning matters of trade and industry;
- to administer the commercial and foundation registers;
- to provide advise to the Minister of Economic Affairs on applications for business permits;
- to support and advise (starting) entrepreneurs and to provide – both solicited and unsolicited – trade information;
- to actively attract potential foreign investment(s).

The Chamber has instituted several standing committees to handle current issues besides the assignment of each board-member to cover certain areas of interest to business.

New projects budgeted for execution in 2001 are the preparation of an overall business plan for the Chamber and the introduction of an on-line connection to our Registers' database. Serving primarily as a tool to assist new entrepreneurs and

attract foreign investors we will continue to upgrade our website www.arubachamber.com and organize workshops on the subject of fraud and integrity in business (also in the English language) as we did successfully last year.

A Climate for Business

Entrepreneurship can best be characterized by its dynamic environment and thus has always been faced with change. Today change is however taking place at a highly accelerated pace and in a myriad of forms. These changes are innovative in terms of the application of advanced technologies and are increasingly influenced by the trends toward globalization of markets. We can observe or perhaps may have even been affected by the impact of globalization on our island's daily business life. A good example hereof is the growing interest for and the rapid development of electronic commerce, be it B2B, B2C or otherwise. Not only must the entrepreneur remain abreast of new developments, but also the consumer must be made aware of the risks involved with the new economy. I only have to refer to the great amount of consumer products and services available on the worldwide web and which can be easily accessed with a personal computer from the comfort of one's home. With online transactions the personal interaction between the consumer and the business tends to get lost and the purchase decision of the consumer

may result flawed because of lack of (sufficient and/or customized) information.

The entrepreneur has to continuously assess market conditions in order to act in a timely fashion. Every change can be considered to hold a challenge and it is only with time one can really ascertain whether the change was an opportunity or a threat.

Several years ago the Chamber observed the early signs of an eroding retail sector in Oranjestad. Regrettably, as per the findings of a recent survey conducted by the Aruba Retail Merchants Association the slow process of decline is now manifest in a drop in sales during 2000 of many retailers. Many of these retailers may be inclined to attribute the poor sales performance to the 'choller' problem. However, it should not be overlooked that the causes – internal and external – can be manifold, ranging from poor quality of merchandise/service to the proliferation of malls or e-commerce. Last year the Chamber held the chair of the national e-commerce committee, which presented a report containing 26 recommendations to the government for implementation. Also, the last two Annual Business Dinner Meetings held by us have focused on creating a greater awareness of the increasing importance of e-commerce for business. The developments in the area of the digitalization of our economy I consider a major challenge for the Chamber and I am enthusiastic to be part of it. We must

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be committed to keeping up with the state-of-the-art telecommunications technology, if we are to be able to provide business with the capabilities for managing change.

Whilst the level of progress in Aruba is very high, everyone should not fail to be aware of the fact that "well-being" is more than just the sum of our material accomplishments. The Chamber has a delicate task in seeing to it that a balance between economic development and the upholding of the norms and values of our Aruban society prevails at all times. In fact, not everything that is good for other countries will be good for us as well.

Although the diversification of our economic activities is heading in the right direction, the fostering of feasible opportunities to further strengthen our economy's structure remains one of the important goals of the Chamber for the coming years. A hands-on approach must be taken in this, such as the organizing of incoming and outgoing fact finding and trade missions to explore the possibilities for trade and investment abroad, such as in the Netherlands, Surinam and other countries. Our infrastructure, namely our modern airport facility, seaports, telecommunication facilities and our freezone areas, can be utilized to selectively target quality investors. In terms of marketing to international markets we should exploit our unique geographic location optimally, for instance by functioning as a center for commercial activities, medical and educational services. Aruba can serve as a bridge for the linking of economic blocs, such as European Union, NAFTA and those in Latin America.

However, the development of all the above – same as with the attraction of investors and tourists - is subject to having and maintaining an appropriate business climate in Aruba, namely economic and

political stability, legal security and safety.

The Fostering of Alliances and Relationships

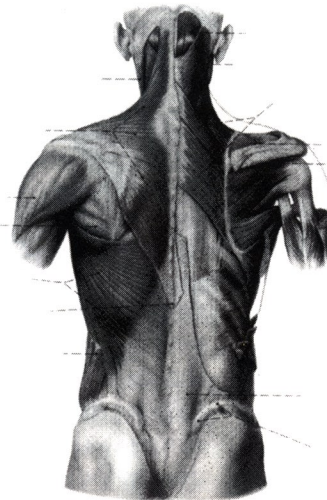
Like business organizations as Aruba Trade & Industry Association, Aruba Hotel & Tourism Association and others, the Chamber acts as an advocate for the national interests of Aruba. The problems encountered by our entrepreneurs are concerns shared by many of these organizations, such as the "choller" nuisance, criminality, free enterprise versus free for all, growth rates and the carrying capacity of our island, the condition of our infrastructure, the protection of our natural environment and the need for zoning rules.

The Chamber will continue to meet – both separately and jointly - with the boards of the various business organizations to brainstorm on the common issues and to come up with

strategies for addressing these pro-actively and successfully. The bundling of our resources is important to accomplishing goals for the community in general. Another arsenal of knowledge and experience which I propose to tap into are the past presidents of the Chamber. By creating a forum for them to meet and discuss the issues at hand with us will enable the Chamber to exchange information efficiently and generate broad-based solutions.

My aspiration during my presidency is to serve and assist whenever and in the best way possible. This of course cannot by no means be accomplished alone, but thru teamwork with all members of the Board and the executive director of the Chamber. I look forward to a year full of positive actions!

DAUPHIN



*The core element here is
the office chair.*

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